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Agri-News

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CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE KICK-OFF SLATED FOR DECEMBER 2002

Farm operators across Tennessee and the Nation are about to participate in establishing a statistical portrait of U.S. agriculture through the 2002 Census of Agriculture. This portrait will include all aspects of agriculture and provide a clear picture of agriculture at the county, State, and National levels, showing in detail how farmers and ranchers stand today compared with 5 years ago. The picture will focus on key information, including the number of farms, farms size, operator characteristics, crop and livestock production, agricultural products sales, and production expenses of farmers and ranchers. Commissioner of Agriculture John W. Rose stated, "Data from the census of agriculture encompass all characteristics of Tennessee's agricultural community and ensures that our state is adequately and accurately represented when decisions affecting the health of the agricultural industry are made."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will begin the Nation's largest information gathering effort for agriculture this December. The census of agriculture is currently conducted every 5 years and was first taken in 1840 as part of the population census. Over 100,000 census of agriculture report forms will be mailed to Tennessee agricultural and potential agricultural producers to collect data for the 2002 calendar year. Completed report forms from each producer are due February 3, 2003. Response to this census, regardless of operation size, ensures that Tennessee agriculture is accurately represented. Reporting is mandatory under Title 7, United States Code. This same law assures that any information provided is confidential and will not be shared with any individual or organization. NASS additionally safeguards the confidentiality of all responses by publishing data only when no individual producer or operation can be identified.

Accurate, timely statistics about agriculture have a number of very important uses. Here are some examples:

- ⇒ Used in formulas that determine distribution of funding for agricultural research, extension projects, and compensation programs.
- ⇒ Farm machinery manufacturers more effectively target their industries to where they are needed by using county and State statistics, resulting in economic benefits for farm operators.
- ⇒ Used by rural electric companies to forecast future energy and resource needs.
- ⇒ Identifies areas of the state that may need migrant workers.
- ⇒ Aides in the establishment of budgets for producer loans.
- ⇒ Measures the economic impact of agriculture on a State's economy.
- ⇒ Allows State Departments of Agriculture to plan for and be responsive to drought, emergency outbreaks of diseases or pest infestations.

New for the 2002 Census of Agriculture will be information on operator characteristics on multiple (up to 3) operators per farm; production contracts/landlord shares; computer and Internet use; more detailed farm related income; and new commodities (bison, elk, llamas, deer, emus, and ostriches).

The census of agriculture is the leading, most comprehensive, uniform source of data regarding agricultural production and operator characteristics for each county, State, and the United States. It is a measurement of where producers stand, their production costs and cropping systems, farm supply needs, and how trends are changing. Anyone who produces, or would normally produce, \$1,000 or more of agricultural products a year who does not receive a 2002 Census of Agriculture report form by January 2003 should call 1-888-4AG-STAT to ensure inclusion in the census of agriculture. Results of the 2002 Census will be available in the spring of 2004. All reports will be available free through the NASS Web site at www.usda.gov/nass. For more information regarding the census and other agricultural statistics, contact Debra Kenerson, Tennessee Agricultural Statistics Service, at 1-800-626-0987 or via e-mail at nass-tn@nass.usda.gov.

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